DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 414 022 PS 025 974

AUTHOR Rabinovich, Elaine Pedreira
TITLE "Sedentary" Homeless Children in S. Paulo, Brazil: Their Houses, Their Families, Their Lifestyles.
PUB DATE 1996-08-00
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development (14th, Quebec City, Quebec, Canada, August 12-16, 1996).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Child Development; Child Rearing; Childhood Needs; Children; *Disadvantaged Environment; *Early Experience; Economically Disadvantaged; Elementary Secondary Education; *Family Environment; Foreign Countries; *Homeless People; Poverty; Poverty Areas
IDENTIFIERS Brazil (Sao Paulo)

ABSTRACT

This study examined the lifestyle of children from a sedentary grouping of 20 homeless families living under a viaduct in Sao Paulo, Brazil. The study particularly focused on issues related to this lifestyle, including dimensions of housing and cultural variations in housing related to child development and child rearing. The lifestyle of the children described in this study differs from that of children of the street because they have families and temporary houses, and differs from squatters because the families may have to move from one urban space to another. The developmental context of these homeless children was found to include mother-child attachment and other multiple and simultaneous relationships; strong influence of peer relationships; autonomy perceived as dangerous by mothers even though children are "on the street"; collective personal space or a sense of self that incorporates other people; polychronic time; lack of sanitary care increasing illness and morbidity; and delayed or absent schooling. (JPB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 414 022

"Sedentary" Homeless children in S. Paulo, Brazil: their houses, their families, their lifestyles.

Elaine Pedreira Rabinovich**
Institute of Psychology, S.Paulo University
Center for Studies of Human Development,
Public Health Faculty, S. Paulo University

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Abstract: This study aims to describe some conditions of the lifestyle of children from a sedentary grouping of 20 homeless families living under a viaduct in the city of S. Paulo, in order to understand the mechanisms between this lifestyle and and some aspects of child development. This lifestyle is intermediary between "children from the street", since they have families and "houses", and "squatters", as they may have to keep moving from one urban space to another. Several methodological resources were used to accomplish this task, including direct observation of space arrangements of the houses, observations of children's activities indoors and outdoors, and child anamnesis. Some characteristics of the developmental context of these children were: context favouring not only mother-child attachment but other multiple and simultaneous relationships; strong influence of peer relationships; autonomy perceived as dangerous by mothers but children being "on the street"; collective personal space or "a sense of self" that incorporates other people (Tronick, 1992); polychronic time (Hall, 1983); lack of sanitary cares favouring morbidity; delayed or absent schooling.

Key-words: Homeless children; developmental context; homeless "houses"; homeless family; temporality.

Introduction

This research is part of a series of ethnographic studies about child development, housing and the lifestyle of Brazilian sociocultural groups (Rabinovich, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995).

This study is an exploratory one that aims to describe some conditions of the lifestyle of a group of homeless children and their families living under a viaduct in the city of S. Paulo in an attempt to understand: the specific dimensions of housing and its surroundings which have the greatest impact on these children's lives; and the cultural variations in housing as it relates to child rearing. This last point emphasizes the crosscultural nature of this study in the belief that comparative studies are necessary to avoid the ethnocentric bias and normative approach that permeates developmental psychology.

PS 025974

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Elaine Pedreira Rabinovich
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

With a population of more than 15 million inhabitants, the metropolitan area of Greater S. Paulo has a high density. The Municipality of S. Paulo, core of the metropolitan area, had 9.48 million inhabitants in 1991, according to the demographic census. As an industrial pole, it attracts many migrants, specially from the northeast part of the country.

In Brazil, there are no conclusive studies about the number of people that live in the streets (Taschner and Rabinovich, 1997). If we take the definition "homeless" issued by the UN that includes those that do not have a stable house, or that live in poor housing conditions, not meeting the minimum housing standards, the number would be some millions, since it would include those who live in squatter sttlements, slums, and other types of poor housing. In 1993, for instance, there were 378 thousands squatters houses in S. Paulo.

Two surveys (1991, 1992) were carried out in the municipality to characterize the homeless and concluded that between 4000 and 10000 people lived in the streets. If we take the definition of "homeless" issued by the UN, the number would be much higher. Many of these people are families.

The effects of homelessness on children may be mediated by socioecological conditions such as poverty, changes in residence, schools and services, disruptions in social networks, loss of possessions and exposure to extreme hardship and by their effects on the parents and on the family system. Research on homeless children, however, has not generally examined mediating mechanisms (Rafferty and Shinn, 1991) but Rivlin (1990) pointed to the possible consequences of homelessness on the identity of the developing child. According to her, the environment models children's lives and personalities, their cognitive, social and affective development, all of which are tied into experiences based on place. Two components of this process are **personal space** and **personal place**. The former is necessary to control the appropriate interpersonal distance and the degree of exterior stimulation, being affected by deprivation and crowding. The latter is necessary to construct the "spatial identity" which is a sub-structure of self-identity consisting of cognitions about the physical world where the person lives. The place is part of the context from which the identity emerges, and it is related to the possibility of forming positive links, to attach oneself to the place.

Rivlin (1990) described four types of homeless lifestyles associated to time : chronic, periodic, temporary and total. In this same direction, homeless people living in S. Paulo, Brazil, have been categorized in four types: wildmen, nomads, cavemen and sedentaries (Rabinovich, 1993). Wildmen was a self-denomination given by a homeless person. He meant that his life was as if he belonged to a tribe that lived in a jungle where there were many different tribes each one the enemy of the others. These are the people usually called homeless,or "from the street". They do not build any sort of house: they just

lie down on the ground, trying to protect themselves with newspapers, boxes or others kinds of coverings or they go to public shelters to sleep and to have a bath. Usually they are men but now-a-days women can be seen as part of the group. Nomads are homeless that live under city bridges. Often they try to build space arrangements that represent a house. This can be done because, in S. Paulo, most people that live in the street work as scrap-collectors: they collect scrap, like paper, cardboard etc to sell, and take "home" the abandoned carpets, tables, chairs, sofas etc that they find and use them for their daily living. This can be done until the authorities move them on. So they start all over again under another bridge. We have found some families with children living as nomads but it was a temporary situation. However, if the authorities, in this case represented by the City Council, do allow them to stay in the place, they start building "houses" and become what we call a sedentary type. When a family becomes sedentary, other families start building houses nearby and a community of sedentary homeless people is established. The last type we call cavemen because they live in between the bridge structure. There are many kinds of cavemen and cavehouses but as they are solid and secure, there are families with children living this way.

Child development may be considered as resulting from a "developmental system" (Oyama, 1989). The developmental system includes the basic psychobiological organization of mother-child dyad and its inherent susceptibility to the belief systems and the concrete living conditions within which development takes place. Development and its context are considered as an integrated whole from which results the developing child. Child development is being considered as a co-gestated, co-regulated and co-constructed system where housing and family - the material and relational netwoks - flow together as the "milieu" (environment) and the "moyen" (means) where and through which these networks will form the basis of the development itself. From this point of view, in order to examine mediating mechanisms we need to focus on more than social policy, namely the persons, objects and symbols with which the child interacts (Bronfenbrenner, 1993).

Objective and Method

This study aims to describe some conditions of children's lifestyle of a sedentary grouping of homeless families living under one viaduct of S. Paulo. We consider as "house" a set of material elements that constitute the frame within the dwellers' activities are carried out (Bernard, 1992). This lifestyle is intermediary between homeless children "from the street" - since they have families and "houses" - and "squatters" - as they keep moving from one urban space to other. It is an exploratory research that considers as its unit of analysis the social and material context of child development in order to understand the mediating mechanisms between lifestyle and child development.

It is an etho-ethnographic study based on: naturalistic observations of the children inside and outside their houses; interviews with the mother about their child and about family organization; description of the house and its belongings (diagrams, photos, videomovie).

Houses were chosen at random, provided there was at least one child of up to 6 years of age. There were a total of 20 houses and 28 children.

The Settlement

The Tatuapé Viaduct is located on the east side of S. Paulo, close to Via Dutra, the highway that connects S. Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Under the viaduct, there is an estimated number of 900 dwellers and 180 temporary houses made of scrap material. This settlement looks like an island having on one side the road and on the other side the walls of a freight company that employs some of the dwellers and has a yard used as a leisure area by the children. In between there is a earth path thress meters wide. The entrances of the houses open to this alley that links almost every house. Electricity clandestinely drawn from lighting poles can be found in every house. Water is provided by the freight company and/or clandestinely drawn from the public network. Flexible hoses take the water to cans or big tins, becoming an important contamination factor. There is a poor sewage system, with ducts conducting the houses' sewage to the rainwater drainage. Also, waste water is directly disposed of onto the streets. Waste water from laundry tanks flows down the alley, in the open. Their address is the bar located next to a courtyard at the beginning of the alley.

The Families

From our data relating to 20 families, with a total of 98 people, 80% living under this viaduct had come from the northeast of Brazil, looking for work. They did work but mostly not on regular jobs. Half of them were children. Their parents were young, aged from 18 to 30 years, 27.5% being less than 20 years old. There was an average of 2.5 children and five persons per house. Only 60% of parents had been to school; most of them had not completed primary school. 65% of the children were born in S. Paulo which has a public education service easily accessible to them but only half of the children attended school, usually in grades lower than the normal for their age group. In the group we studied, women stayed home while men went to work. The mean time they had lived there was one year, with a range from a few days to 8 years. Half of the families were nuclear families and half of them lived with another family in the house or had a relative living next door. There was one single parent family. Half would like to go back to their birthplace and half to move to a better place in a house of their own. They ate basically rice and beans.

Only 20% of them ate meat and 25% ate vegetables. Most of them said they ate three meals a day.

The houses

The viaduct dwellers lived in dark houses made of scrap material, with an area of about 30 square meters, with no doors except for the entrance door, no regular walls but some divisions made of scrap, curtains or furniture. These divisions formed sleeping rooms and kitchens, one or the other serving also as a guest-room. Half of them had bathrooms but these were make-shift since there was no running water. Only four houses had a single tap. Others stored water in cans or other vessels. Only one had a cold shower. Single beds, double beds, stoves, sofas, tables and TVs were the main furniture . There was one bed for two or three persons. Houses were ornamented with pillows, curtains, carpets, little tablecloths. On the walls, there were photos of relatives, pictures with childish motifs, pictures and objects with religious motifs and posters. They were clean and neat. All these itens transformed these "houses" into real homes. None had any possibility of privacy or intimacy. Instead, a collectivist lifestyle was revealed by these observations. This collectivist lifestyle based on a pattern influenced by physical and sociocultural practices suggested a *collective personal space*, "a pattern of simultaneous and multiple relationships" that could lead to "a sense of self that incorporates other people" (Tronick, Ivey, Morelli, 1992, p.586). In addition, two themes relating to "temporality" appeared: routines were not based on special places for special activities since many different activities were done in the same place (no specialized space); space arrangements of the houses were continuously changing (continuous transformation of space arrangements). We could recognize what Hall (1983) called polychronic time. Polychronic time is opposed to monochronic time and means that many things are done at the same time. It stresses involvements to people (relational society) rather than adherence to preset schedules,tasks and procedures (individualistic society). Mono-chronic scheduling is used as a classification that orders life, "is like a room with a closed door ensuring privacy",(...), "it subtly influences how we think and perceive the world in segmented compartments".(...) 'Latino peoples are example of the opposite"(p.49).

The Children

Pregnancy and delivery were normal. Although not planned, mostly children were welcome. They were breastfed till 3 months(58%), 7 months(21%) and others were still being breastfed. Only 30% had daily routines. Co-sleeping was predominant. Half of the children walked before 12 months and 20% after 19 months. Speech development appeared to be late. Their state of health was normal for poor children living in a big city: never sick:25%, malnutrition:5%, anaemia:5%; dehydration:15%; pneumonia:20%; diarrhoea:

15%. However, from direct observations, we saw 3 dehydrated children and many allergic and respiratory problems. Mothers' reaction to a child's crying was to calm or hold (63%),do nothing(21%)," never cries" (18%), and beating (5%). Mothers attitudes to child's independence were: mother always close to child and mother goes after her child or worries about child not being close to her. Only 10% of mothers said they allowed their children freedom.

Twenty-eight infants and children under the age of 6 were observed inside their houses. About 50 children aged from 3 to 12 years were observed outside relating to peer in the alley and in the courtyard located at the beginning of the alley.

Inside the houses, it was observed *caring*: defined as responsiveness to child demands and necessities; cleaniness; dressing; physical and verbal interactions and stimulations; *autonomy*: defined as the opportunities to explore objects, space and persons outside their home; what the child was doing, with whom he was doing it, where he was he doing it and what were the consequences; who was with the child,doing what and how, within a distance of 3 meters.

The above observations showed that in relation to caring, 54% were considered as receiving adequate care, 32% as receiving inadequate care and 14% as receiving "super-care". In relation to autonomy 20 children were observed. 50% of them showed no or little autonomy and 45% showed limited autonomy.One child whose siblings were beggars had total autonomy.

From these observations, it could be seen there were many different patterns of care and affective interaction in this same social context. Referring to inadequate care, three conditions emerged. Some infants were not stimulated apparently because of cultural beliefs. Their parents were from the Northeast where child mortality is traditionally very high and so parents maintain a certain detachment until the child is one year old and they are sure that it will survive. We believe this is the reason why some children had their motor development delayed and some mothers seemed to pay little attention to their children. To confirm this hypothesis, one mother said that her child's motor development accelerated when she arrived from Bahia because in S.Paulo mothers stimulated their children much more than there. Another mother had been previously classified as unsatisfatory in caring since her baby was laying naked and dirty on a bed, surrounded by flies, receiving no attention. However, during a later visit, she displayed her interest by proudly showing the baby to the researcher. Besides this cultural system belief, the physical condition of the house demanded a higher degree of organization: the lack of water requires greater efforts to maintain hygienic condition. Family desorganization as seen in houses not cleaned and/or not tidy affected the child's development by increasing its susceptibility to illness. The last condition that seemed to affect infant development was the mother's subjective

condition: mothers apparently deprived (socially and/or emotionally) seemed not give adequate care to their child.

The collectivist context influenced the mother-child relationship and consenquently the child's development. Space arrangements favoured attachment and closeness on the one hand, and relations with many adults and children, on the other. Mother and child were always surrounded by adults and children, having the opportunity of interrelating to each other. Children had many caretakers, beside their mother, but the mother was always available to her child because everything was near by. As an example, a 4 year old girl, lying on a hammock located at the entrance of the house, had fever. She had a big rose bow in her hair and was surrounded by her worried mother and other children who wanted her to play with them as usual.

As they got older, these children had many opportunities for social contacts with other children and adults. The alley was a kind of backyard for the houses. Even if the mothers said they did not allow their children to go outside, this was virtually impossible to achieve. Houses were very small, terraced, with no windows and bad lighting so that the front door was always open. There were about 300 children milling around in the street. Children were naturally attracted by other children. Mothers also stayed outside, talking, washing clothes and dishes or even cooking with their children by their side. As an example,a 3 year old girl was going to take a bath when researchers arrived. During the interview, the girl went out and stayed playing outside near the house with a group of girls. All the group came in and out to see what was going on but also because the mother called her. The mother finished combing the child's hair and she continued running about in front of the house until we went away.

Life in the street seemed to be highly challenging for these homeless parents since they were literally in the street. Parents tried to restrain this "enemy"- since, in Brazil, the street is represented as the "place of evil" (DaMatta, 1985): outdoor and indoor are dual and contradictory value systems. In this particular lifestyle, street values could easily become stronger than family values since these families were exposed to extreme hardship. Mothers tried to keep their children under control but children as young as 6 were in street.

In summary, we can say that this particular homeless lifestyle favoured attachment and socialization.Automomy is a controversial question since mothers denied it although direct observation showed it.

Children in the alley

Children were observed in the alley and in the courtyard during their free activities. They circulated freely through these spaces and also from house to house, in groups of three or four. They constantly changed their activities and places. Group composition also varied, without any apparent disturbance of the activity. No adult was seen playing with children or interfering in the play activities. Only one mother ended the

"making house" activity of a group of three girls aged 3 or 4,taking away the comb,the broom and the sponge, objects used in the game.

Playing seemed a way of being together and doing something more than competing. One child pushed another and changed positions: one boy wetted another boy with a water pistol and changed positions; one boy jumped from a wall, then the other and so on. Leaderships were accepted without question. For play activities children divided themselves by sex, by age and by kinship. The main play activities observed were imitation of adults, mutual imitation activities and active games. Games with very simple rules could be observed. Objects - bicycles, balls, pistol, dolls, cars - belonged to all players during playtime, although they really belonged to one child. Their function was to facilitate the relationship between partners through the activity.

Some boys between 10 to 13 years were seen working: some were fixing the carts that they use to carry vegetables bought in the street market to customer's house,others helped their relatives in collecting scrap.

From observing lifestyles and children's free activities, one could see that peer relationships were fundamental in child socialization. As well as in the house, "temporality" - in the sense that as homeless they are temporary and in the sense they are always changing their space arrangements - could be seen in aspects of play activities: focus of attention quickly changing its object; never staying still in one same place; constant changes of activities and group formation. The collective organization of houses and settlement could be seen in: "relational" rules for games since play was more directed to group belonging than to competitiveness and rules; activities directed to the group as a whole and not aiming to differentiate between participants; objects belonging to everybody and serving as intermediary tools to attain the purpose of playing and not of possession; no question of leadership; no clear differentiation between private and collective space; adult imitation games indicating an "enculturating" learning system more than a "teaching" one (Dasen,1991)

Conclusion

Some characteristics of this settlement of sedentary homeless children were: developmental context favouring not only mother-child attachment but simultaneous and multiple other relationships; strong influence of peer relationships; collective personal space or "a sense of self that incorporates other people" (Tronick, 1992); polychronic temporality; autonomy perceived by mothers as dangerous and children being "in the street"; lack of sanitary care increasing liability to sickness; early differentiation between "well-developed" and "under-developed" children due to lack of social assistance for parents difficulties; lack of social assistance tending to family instability.

These characteristics can be subsumed in three main aspects: one is collective lifestyle, a second is lack of social stability. The third is the consequence of the effects of these two on parents, on the family system and on children's feelings about their own future. Most important of all, this study has shown also that, firstly, homeless does not mean necessarily not having a "house" since these householders create a make-believe house in the absence of a real one. Secondly, poverty is not an over-all condition. This contradicts the common view of poverty as a stigma, which reinforces the processes of social exclusion.

References

Bernard,Y.(1992).*La France au Logis*.Liège: Mardaga

Bronfenbrenner,U.(1993)Living Through Societal Chaos: Developmental Risks and Rescues. *Newsletter,International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development*.Number 1,Serial 23

DaMatta,R.(1985) *A casa e a rua* (The house and the street).S.Paulo: Brasiliense

Dasen,P.R. (1991) Contribution de la Psychologie Interculturelle à la Formation des Enseignants pour une Education Interculturelle.IN: Lavallée,M, Ouellet,F., Larose,F. *Identité, Culture et Changement Social*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

Hall,E.T.(1983).*The Dance of Life.The Other Dimension of Time*.New York:Doubleday

Molnar,J.M.,Rath,W.R.,Klein,T.P.(1990) Constantly compromised: The impact of homelessness on children. *Journal of Social Issues*, 46(4): 109-124

Oyama,S.(1989) Ontogeny and the Central Dogma:Do we need the concept of Genetic Programing in Order to have an Evolutionary Perspective?in Gunnar,M.R,Thele,E.(eds).*Systmes and Development,the Minnesota Symposium on Child Psuchology* .New Jersey:Lawrence Elbaum.Vol.27

Rabinovich,E.P.(1992)*A casa dos sem casa* (Houses of the homeless). Psicologia. Ciência e Profissão, 12(3): 16-25

Rabinovich,E.P.(1993).*Le logis des sans logis* . Cahiers Santé, 3(5): 375-81

Rabinovich,E.P.(1993).*Way of living and Mother-child Relationship.* XIIth Biennial Meeting of ISSBD, Recife,Brazil,19-23 July.Poster Abstract,p.168

Rabinovich,E.P.(1994) O Modo de Morar como indicador qualtitativo de desenvolvimento infantil: um estudo com crianças de 0-3 anos na zona rural do Piauí (Dwelling as a qualitative indicator of child development: a study of 0-3 years old children from the rural zone, Piauí) *Caderno de Desenvolvimento Infantil*, 1(1): 47-59

Rabinovich,E.P.(1995) O viés etnocêntrico: uma tentativa de analisar algumas questões do desenvolvimento infantil a partir do estudo de crianças do interior do Piauí (The ethnocentric bias: an essay in the analysis of some questions about child development from a study based on children in Piauí). *Revista Brasileira de Crescimento e Desenvolvimento Humano*, v.5, n.1/2, p.60-5, 1995.

Rafferty,Y. and Shinn,M.(1991).The Impact of Homelessness on Children.*American Psychologist*, 46(11):1170-1179

Rivlin,L.G.(1990).Home and Homelessness in the Life of Children.*Child and Youth Services*, 14(1):5-17

Taschner,S., Rabinovich,E.P.(1996). The Homeless in São Paulo: spatial arrangements. In: Hugh, M.J.; Wright, T., eds. *International Critical Perspectives on Homelessness*. Westport, Praeger, 1997.

Tronick,E.Z.,Morelli,G.A.,Ivey,P.K.(1992).The Efe Forager Infant and Toddler's Pattern of Social Relationships:Multiple ans Simultaneous.*Developmental Psychology*, 28(4): 568-577

The author is a clinical psychologist, Master's in Experimental Psychology and is a doctor in Social Psychology at the Institute of Psicologia, S. Paulo University. She is a researcher of Center of Studies for Human Growth and Development, Public Health Faculty, S. Paulo University. She wants to express her thanks to Profs Emma Otta and Cesar Ades for their support to this paper and to FAPESP. Special greetings to Aparecida Norma Martins, Juliana Telles de Azevedo, Maria de Fátima Neves da Silva e Vanessa Bombardi for field work and discussion of data. She wants to express also her thanks to Jeremy Minns for the English translation.

Correspondence to:Elaine Pedreira Rabinovich, Rua Maranhão 101 ap. 101 CEP 01241-001, São Paulo,S.P., Brasil.Tel:55-11-2554509; Fax:55-11-30641352. e-mail: Elainepr@sanet.com.br